

## Message Text

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ACTION AF-02

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FM AMEMBASSY PRETORIA

TO USINFO WASHDC IMMEDIATE

SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7110

INFO USUN NEW YORK IMMEDIATE 1503

AMCONSUL CAPE TOWN

AMCONSUL DURBAN

AMCONSUL JOHANNESBURG

UNCLAS SECTION 1 OF 2 PRETORIA 1266

CAPE TOWN ALSO FOR EMBASSY

USIA FOR IOP/M, IAA

DEPT FOR AF/S

E.O. 11652: N/A

SUBJ: RSA PRESS ON PROPOSED PRESS CENSORSHIP

SUMMARY: BOTH AFRIKAANS PRO-SAG AND ENGLISH OPPOSITION  
FACTIONS OF RSA PRESS UNITED IN RESISTANCE TO NEWSPAPER  
BILL TABLED MARCH 11 IN PARLIAMENT. RSA PRESS, THOUGH  
ALREADY OPERATING IN MINEFIELD OF LEGISLATIVE RESTRICTIONS,  
WIDELY REGARDED AS COMPARATIVELY FREEST IN AFRICA.  
PROPOSED NEW CENSORSHIP LEGISLATION, WHICH WOULD GIVE  
SAG UNPRECEDENTED POWERS OVER PRESS, SEEN AS CULMINA-  
TION OF YEARS OF THREATS FROM PM VORSTER AND INTERIOR  
MINISTER MULDER, PARTICULARLY AGAINST OPPOSITION ENGLISH  
PRESS. NATIONAL PRESS UNION(NPU), ASSOCIATION OF NEWS-  
PAPER PROPRIETORS AND PUBLISHERS, TRIED TO WARD OFF FURTHER  
RESTRICTIVE LEGISLATION THROUGH IN-HOUSE MEASURES BUT  
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APPARENTLY NOT TO SAG SATISFACTION. FRIDAY MARCH 11 INTRO-  
DUCTION OF NEW MEASURE BY MINISTER MULDER GENERATED  
MASSIVE, CRITICAL, PRESS REACTION, WITH ENGLISH AND  
AFRIKAANS PRESS UNANIMOUS BUT ENGLISH MORE OUTSPOKEN.  
END SUMMARY.

1. BACKGROUNDER IN " RAND DAILY MAIL" MARCH 14 SAID:

" THE NEWSPAPER BILL NOW BEFORE PARLIAMENT IS THE CULMINATION OF THE LONG HISTORY OF HOSTILITY BY THE RULING NATIONAL PARTY TOWARD THE PRESS, PARTICULARLY THE ENGLISH-LANGUAGE PRESS WHICH IT CHARGED WITH (1) INCITING BLACKS AGAINST WHITES AND THEREBY DAMAGING RACE RELATIONS AND THREATENING PUBLIC SAFETY, AND (2) DIRECTLY AND INDIRECTLY PROVIDING THE BASIS FOR REPORTS IN OVERSEAS NEWSPAPERS WHICH SWELL THE TIDE OF WORLD HOSTILITY AGAINST THE PRESENT REGIME. NEWSPAPER EDITORS HAVE REPEATEDLY DENIED THESE ACCUSATION, THEY HAVE INSISTED THAT IT IS NOT THE REPORTS WHICH HARM RACE RELATIONS OR BLACKEN RSA'S NAME ABROAD, BUT THE POLICIES OF THE NATIONAL PARTY AND THE RESPONSES WHICH THEY HAVE EVOKED IN THE BLACK COMMUNITY." "RDM'S POLITICAL CORRESPONDENT WROTE MARCH 12 "UNPREDEDEDNTED POWERS TO CONTROL RSA'S PRESS WITHOUT RECOURSE BY THE NEWSPAPERS TO THE COURTS OF LAW, ARE CONTAINED IN THE GOVT'S SHOCK NEWSPAPER BILL. IT SPELLS OUT EXACTLY HOW IT WANTS NEWS REPORTS, PHOTOGRAPHS AND COMMENTS HANDLED BY NEWSPAPERS AND SETS THE STANDARDS OF DECENCY AND MORALITY ON WHICH NEWSPAPERS ARE TO OPERATE."

2. IN FRONTPAGE EDITORIAL COMMENT MARCH 11 JOHANNESBURG AFRIKAANS PAPER "DIE VADERLAND" SAID PROPOSED LEGISLATION " COULD FOR THE FIRST TIME REMOVE EFFECTIVE CONTROL OF THE PRESS FROM THE PRESS. UNTIL NOW RSA COULD CLAIM A FREE PRESS, AT LEAST THE FREEST IN AFRICA. BUT NOW FOREIGN OPINION WILL REGARD THE NEW PROPOSAL AS THE END OF PRESS FREEDOM IN OUR LAND. THE RESTRICTIONS ARE SO WIDE THAT A JOURNALIST WOULD NOT FUNCTION NORMALLY FOR FEAR OF UNCLASSIFIED

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CONTRAVENTION. THIS FEAR WILL HANG OVER EVERY EDITORIAL DESK, AMOUNTING TO CENSORSHIP THROUGH FEAR... THIS IS NOT IN THE INTERESTS OF RSA."

3. MASS CIRCULATION AFRIKAANS PAPER " RAPPORT" MARCH 13 SAID " THERE CAN ONLY BE LOSERS IN WAR BETWEEN GOVT AND PRESS, AND THE BIGGEST LOSER WILL BE RSA'S IMAGE AS A FREE NATION. IN THAT RESPECT THE BILL WILL ACHIEVE PRECISELY WHAT IT IS DESIGNED TO PREVENT-- DAMAGE TO OUR NATIONAL IMAGE."

4. JOHANNESBURG AFRIKAANS PAPER " DIE TRANSVALER" MARCH 14 ALSO STRESSED DAMAGING CONSEQUENCES FOR RSA IMAGE. " THERE MUST BE GREATER EFFORT TO REACH ACCEPTABLE COMPROMISE SO THAT THE CURRENT BILL IS NOT ENACTED."

5. PRETORIA FRIKAANS PAPER " OGGENDBLAD" MARCH 14 SAID " THIS BILL IS UNACCEPTABLE. PRESS AND GOVT SHOULD TALK AGAIN, PREFERABLY BEFORE THE BILL IS TAKEN FURTHER."

6. CAPE TOWN AFRIKAANS PAPER " DIE BURGER" MARCH 15 CALLED FOR FURTHER NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN PRESS AND GOVT. " IT IS COMMON CAUSE THAT RSA-- DESPITE A DEEPENING CRISIS OF SURVIVAL WHICH NATURALLY STRENGTHENS THE TENDENCY TOWARDS REGIMENTATION-- MUST CONSTANTLY MAINTAIN GREATEST MEASURE OF PRESS FREEDOM. IT IS ALSO COMMON CAUSE THAT FREEDOM WITHOUT DICIPLINE AND INTEGRITY DEGENERATES INTO LAWLESSNESS, WHICH COULD BECOME NATIONALLY DANGEROUS."

7. JLIBERAL JOHANNESBURG ENGLISH PAPER " RDM" SAID IN FRONT PAGE EDITORIAL MARCH 12 " IN PROPOSING TO DESTROY PRESS FREEDOM AS IT HAS BEEN KNOWN IN RSA. THE GOVT'S REASON HAS FINALLY SNAPPED. FEW ACTIONS IN NEARLY 29 YEARS OF NATIONALIST RULE CAN MATCH THE DAMAGE THAT WILL BE DONE BY THIS MEASURE. FOR THE LIMITED PRESS FREEDOM

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WHICH WE STILL ENJOY IS THE ONE REMAINING THREAD OF RESPECTABILITY IN THE TATTERED CLOAK OF DEMOCRACY WHICH THIS GOVT WEARS SO UNEASILY". SAME PAPER EDITORIALISED

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INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 PA-01 INR-01 /005 W  
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O R 161522Z MAR 77  
FM AMEMBASSY PRETORIA  
TO USINFO WASHDC IMMEDIATE  
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AMCONSUL CAPE TOWN  
AMCONSUL DURBAN  
AMCONSUL JOHANNESBURG

UNCLAS FINAL SECTION 2 OF 2 PRETORIA 1266

CAPE TOWN ALSO FOR EMBASSY

MARCH 14 " WHATEVER THE COMPETITION BETWEEN NEWSPAPER GROUPS, WHATEVER THE DIFFERENCES IN POLITICAL OUTLOOK AND LANGUAGE BETWEEN NEWSPAPERS, THE VIEW IS UNANIMOUS: THERE CAN BE NO NEGOTIATION ABOUT STATE CONTROL."

8. CONSERVATIVE JOHANNESBURG ENGLISH PAPER " THE CITIZEN" MARCH 12 SAID " LET THE PRESS REMAIN FREE. THAT IS THE EARNEST APPEAL WE MAKE TO THE GOVT. THE NEW BILL THREATENS THE VERY FOUNDATIONS OF PRESS FREEDOM. WE HOPE THE GOVT WILL LISTEN TO THE OUTCRY FROM THE PRESS. IT IS AN OUTCRY THAT IS UNANIMOUS, COMING FROM THE ENGLISH AND AFRIKAANS PRESS, FROM THE PROPRIETORS AND THE EDITORS." SAME PAPER SAID MARCH 14 THE PROPOSED BILL " PUTS FORWARD A CODE OF CONDUCT WHICH IS VAGUE, EMBARRASSING AND CAPABLE OF BEING INTERPRETED AND MISINTERPRETED IN ANY WAY. SO MANY PITFALLS, SO MANY DANGERS, LIE IN STORE FOR NEWSPAPERS THAT THEY WILL NO LONGER JUST WALK THROUGH A MINEFIELD OF LAWS ALREADY ON THE STATUTE BOOK BUT WILL BE BOOBY-TRAPPED AND WAYLAID AT EVERY TURN... IN SHORT, IT IS A GHASTLY BILL WHICH PLACES NEWSPAPER UNCLASSIFIED

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IN A POSITION OF ABSOLUTE UNCERTAINTY, STRAIN AND FEAR."

9 JOHANNESBURG ENGLISH PAPER " SUNDAY EXPRESS" MARCH 13 SAID IN FRONTPAGE EDITORIAL" DEMOCRACY DIES WHEN THE STATE STEPS IN TO CONTROL THE PRESS, AND A COMMUNITY KEPT IGNORANT OF THE DESPERATE CURRENTS AND EMOTIONS THAT EXIST IN ITS MIDST CANNOT EVEN BEGIN TO PLAN FOR ITS OWN SECURITY OR FUTURE. DOWN THE YEARS THE GOVT HAS BEEN ASSIDUOUSLY LIMITING THE RIGHT TO KNOW WHAT HAS BEEN GOING ON. NOW COMES A FINAL FEROCIOUS STROKE THAT HERALDS THE DEATH OF PRESS FREEDOM. THE TARGET IS NOT JUST AN ISOLATED ENGLISH - LANGUAGE NEWSPAPER OR TWO. AFRIKAANS EDITORS RECOGNIZE THIS FULL WELL. THAT IS WHY THEY TOO REJECT GOVT INTERVENTION."

10. CAPE TOWN ENGLISH PAPER " CAPE TIMES" MARCH 14 SAID NEW BIL IS " INVASION OF BASIC HUMAN RIGHTS, WHICH DAMAGES RSA MOST GRIEVOUSLY, DISCREDITS THE JUDICIAL SYSTEM, AND IS ILL- CONCEIVED EVEN IN ITS BASIC DETAILS." DESCRIBING THE BILL AS " OBNOXIOUS IN PRINCIPLE" PAPER SAID EXISTING PRESS COUNCIL"ALREADY HAS MORE PUNITIVE POWERS THAN MANY SENIOR JOURNALISTS THINK ADVISABLE AND RSA PAPERS ARE DAILY THREATENED BY MORE LAWS THAN IN ANY WESTERN COUNTRY. THINGS HAVE GONE FAR ENOUGH."

11. MASS CIRCULATION" SUNDAY TIMES" MARCH 13 SAID IN FRONT PAGE EDITORIAL" WITH ONE THOUGHTLESS STROKE OF A

LEGISLATIVE PEN, THE GOVT IS ABOUT TO ELIMINATE ONE OF  
RSA'S MOST PRECIOUS POSSESSIONS- THE FREEDOM OF EXPRES-  
SION THAT, IN THE EYES OF THE WORLD, DISTINGUISHES RSA  
FROM DESPOTISM ELSEWHERE IN AFRICA. MAKE NO MISTAKE, THE  
NEWSPAPER BILL NOW BEFORE PARLIAMENT PROVIDES FOR EFFEC-  
TIVE STATE CONTROL OVER WHAT NEWSPAPERS MAY PRINT-- AND  
CONSEQUENTLY OVER EVERY INDIVIDUALS'S LIBERTY TO EXPRESS  
HIMSELF. IT ALSO DICTATES WHAT HE MAY KNOW. DR. MULDER  
IS WASTING HIS BREATH WHEN HE TRIES TO PERSUADE THE WORLD  
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OTHERWISE."

12. DURBAN ENGLISH PAPER " NATAL MERCURY" MARCH 16  
SUGGESTED SAG AND NPU COMPROMISE" BEFORE TOO MUCH  
DAMAGE IS DONE. BUT IT SHOULD BE CLEARLY UNDERSTOOD THAT  
ON ONE POINT COMPROMISE WITH HONOR IS NOT POSSIBLE FOR  
A GOOD NEWSPAPER, AND THAT POINT EMBODIES THE PRINCIPLE  
THERE WOULD BE NO STATUTORY CONTROL OF THE PRESS. IF  
THERE IS DIRTY WORK TO BE DONE, THEN IT SHOULD BE DONE BY  
THE GOVT." PAPER HOPED NPU WOULD NOT FALTER " IN FACE  
OF SAG INTIMIDATION."

13 MINISTER MULDER HAS TWICE DEFENDED THE PRESS BILL  
SINCE INTRODUCTION IN PARLIAMENT MARCH 11. IN SABC-TV  
INTERVIEW MARCH 13 MULDER SAID " THE PRESS MUST REPORT  
BUT MUST ALSO ENSURE RSA'S IMAGE IS NOT PREJUDICED. I  
WOULD EXPECT NOTHING MORE FROM A FREE AND RESPONSIBLE  
PRESS THAN FROM A LOYAL AND PATRIOTIC, IF NECESSARY, CRITICAL  
CITIZEN WHO LOVES HIS COUNTRY." MULDER TOLD AUDIENCE  
AT PORTERVILLE IN WESTERN CAPE MARCH 15 THAT JOURNALISTS  
WHO IGNORED NEW MEASURES WOULD HAVE A "CRUEL ENCOUNTER  
WITH THE NEWSPAPER BILL... POPULAR OF UNPOPULAR, THIS IS  
A STAND WE MUST TAKE FOR THE SAKE OF RSA AND THE FUTURE...  
NO DICIPLINED, LOYAL, RESPONSIBLE JOURNALIST WILL HAVE  
ANY PROBLEM WITH THIS LAW." MINISTER SAID " TWISTING OF  
FACTS", AND " PRESENTATION OF HALF TRUTHS" WOULD RECEIVE  
IMMEDIATE ATTENTION UNDER NEW LEGISLATION.

14. NOTE: BOTH RSA PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISTS' BODIES, THE SOUTH  
AFRICAN SOCIETY OF JOURNALISTS AND THE UNION OF BLACK JOURNALISTS HAVE

PUBLICLY REJECTED NEWSPAPER BILL. JOURNALISTS ON  
AFRIKAANS PAPERS BELONG TO NEITHER BODY AND HAVE NO  
SEPARATE REPRESENTATIVE BODY.  
HUGHES

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## Message Attributes

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**To:** USIA STATE  
**Type:** TE  
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